



Pass Christian, Mississippi

The

# Tricentennial

Volume 2, Issue Three February 17, 1999

Colonization Tricentennial

Committee

## Pass Christian Black Heritage

During a return visit to Pass Christian, for Black History Month, in 1983, Louis Perkins extolled, "It is for my ancestors I carry on. We must open the door for the little children coming on. We must be the lighthouse that beacons for others."

On another occasion, he exclaimed, "Blacks now growing up in this nation must look to their own communities for motivation and inspiration. There are too few national heroes to provide such inspiration."

It is for this reason that this issue of the Tricentennial Newsletter has chosen Black History Month to commemorate another significant segment of its rich history that has been a part of the Pass Christian area since the most early days of settlement.

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### Early Black Heritage

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Many citizens of Pass Christian originated from descendants of the first settlers, most of whom were Black slaves. Through the years, by cohabitation and inter-marriages with French settlers and native Indians, mixed blood strains were produced. Contrary to other sections of the early South and Eastern seaboard states, quite a number of Blacks residing in the coastal regions of Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi became *freemen*. In Pass Christian, this resulted in a

number of Black citizens owning beach-shore and center of town property. Many of these *Free Persons of Color*, besides owning homes and small dairy farms, were financially comfortable in representing a dynamic and viable real estate domain. For the most part, prior to the Civil War, White residents of the "Pass" were not filled with the turbulent prejudices as had erupted in other parts of the South. Instead, White residents exhibited a high regard for the Black population, which had strong blood connections with many of the original French throughout the Pass, including their neighbors at the Wolf and DeLisle waterways.

Some of the free Black population was contributed to during the 1790s and early 1800s by the resettlement of free Black families migrating from South Carolina and New Orleans as well as those who fled from Martinique and other French speaking Caribbean islands that were undergoing political unrest. The wealthier free Black families sought refuge along the coasts of Louisiana and Mississippi, thereby becoming new land holders.

For this and many more reasons, the Pass Christian area is quite unique among Mississippi and other Gulf Coast communities.

A substantial number of the first Negro slaves in Pass Christian were given their freedom upon the death of their slave owners. One reason for this was that Pass Christian did not conform to the Southern plantation economy that was reliant upon slavery for its workforce; and a second reason was due to the mixed blood lines of some of those who were freed. However, as throughout the South, as well as the Nation, slavery continued as an institution and a way of life. Therefore, in some cases, former freed slaves, became slave holders themselves. Some even bought slave relatives on condition of setting them free.



## Charles Asmard and Madeline Freed African Slaves

The former Charles Asmard property, also known as the *Charlot Claim*, now encompasses the mid-town commercial district of Pass Christian. It ranges from the Mississippi Sound north toward Bayou Portage; and from a short distance West of Market Street to 100 yards East of Seal Avenue. This property is described in the *Widow Asmar Will* and designated on an 1812 Geodetic Survey map by Henry Washington. The lands consisted of 20 Arpents fronting on the Gulf, extending 40 arpents deep to Bayou Portage (It is sometimes reflected as 800 square arpents, which is a conversion to 691 square acres.)

Two years before the *Widow Asmar's* death on January 6, 1802, Charles and Madeline had taken possession through a Deed of Gift. All succeeding governing authorities honored, without challenge, its legality.

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### Charles Asmard's Will and Heritage

Freed Negro, Charlot Asmar died in 1835, leaving a Will dated September 19, 1834. After his wife Madeline's death, Charles had taken up with one of his slaves, Winny. The disposition of his real property is cited as follows.

*"In consideration of many faithful services of my female slave, Winny, I give and bequeath her freedom and emancipation from slavery . . . and bequeath to the said Winny the lot of land on my plantation containing one French arpent in front and forty arpents in depth on which is a dwelling with a kitchen . . . It is my desire that she shall submit to the directions and control of . . . August Clause in all matters concerning her future behavior and conduct."*

*"I give and bequeath to Calvin Bradley son of Celeste Ladner of Pass Christian aforesaid thirty head of meat cattle and one of my horses; after first choice of one horse to August Clause. I give and bequeath to Payon Asmar(d) a lot of land containing one French Arpent front and forty arpents in depth, also two cows with calves which were willed to her by my deceased wife, Madeleine. I appoint Raymond Lizana (white) of*

*Wolf River as my Executor. The remaining of my estate to me equally distributed to the heirs of Joseph Labat, Jr., Jean Baptiste, Ameel and Edmoir Labat and to the son of the deceased Phrosine Labat, now at New Orleans. And also to my heirs, Eugene Ladner, Celeste Ladner, Francois Benoit, and Philansse Sandery."*

Charles had been approached by many Whites to sell his property, but only sold as much as he needed in order to keep his extended family provided for on his dairy farm. He left his declared heirs with substantial holdings that were distributed among them. However, they in turn, slowly loosened their hold on the land. Over a period of time, the property was slowly sold off in portion sales.

*(Through deed title research, the "Winny Lot," consisting of 192-Gulf frontage, seems to be the site of the "Union Quarters" property on Scenic Drive.)*

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### Early Names of Record

Early recorded family names of *Free Persons of Color* included: Celeste Ladner's children, Calvin Bradley, Virginia Bradley, and Benjamin Morgan; Isabell Asmard's heirs were, Charles "Bozes" Asmard, Vincente Azemard, Jean Baptiste Clause, August Clause, and Carmelite Noel; another family group consisted of Bernard Benoit, Rosalie Benoit, and Madelaine Decoudreaux; and, another family group was: Bernard Fayard, Helair Fayard, and Marcilette Marceau; and another group was: Joseph Labat, Sr., Joseph Labat, Jr., Zulima Labat, Amelia Holly, Adelaid Piernas, Edmund Labat, and Ursin Lavigne. (These deed records can be found at the Harrison and Hancock courthouses.)

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### Builders and Tradesmen

Former house builder and craftsman Thomas Spencer constructed many of the houses that are in Pass Christian Isles that date back from 1940 to 1960.

Martial Dedeaux and his brother operated a livery stable and taxi service that would pick up arriving passengers returning from New Orleans each day at the L&N depot located at Davis Avenue and the tracks. During the early 1900s, Martial was a well known entrepreneur who also operated an Ice House and Cleaners on his property which ran from Beach Boulevard to Second Street where the Heritage Building is now located.



## TRACING MY ANCESTOR'S FOOTSTEPS IN SOUTHWEST MISSISSIPPI A Genealogical Journey by Philip Terrell, Ph. D.

It's simply amazing how once one reaches the age of forty, he/she almost instinctively begins to develop a strong desire to rediscover their roots. At forty-something, forty-three to be exact, I'm no exception.

Although I had studied U.S. history, Mississippi history, and European history at Mississippi State University in early to mid 1970's and had taught high school until 1980, surprisingly, the world of genealogy and my own history background never crossed paths until I passed the age of forty.

Although I had thought about my family history often and remembered some of the stories that my mother and father shared with me over the years, it was not until after a conversation with a colleague that I began to research my family history.

As a result of prior discussions with my father, Ledell Terrell, I knew that his parents were Richard Terrell and Jessie Gayten Terrell, who were my paternal grandparents. I also learned that Richard Terrell's parents and my great-grandparents were Jerry and Mary Terrell. However, with the exception of the fact that my father, grandfather, and great-grandfather all resided in Lincoln County, Mississippi, sometime during their lives, and that my great-grandfather, Jerry Terrell, homesteaded some land there, I had virtually no other information.

After locating old family documents and developing genealogical questions, I initially began talking to Ms. Anne S. Anderson (who once maintained a collection of genealogical material), my first stop was the Hancock County Courthouse. There I was able to locate documents concerning my parents in the Hancock County Circuit Clerk's office that promised to provide, and eventually did provide, information about my grandparents. To my surprise, the information had been there all along.

One of the first documents I obtained was a copy of my parents' marriage application. This document revealed that they were married in 1932. It also provided the address of my grandparents, Richard and Jessie Terrell, at the time of my parents' wedding. And just a few doors down in the Chancery Clerk's office, I was able to locate the list of educable children. I had hoped this list would provide information once I began research on my mother's family, since my mother was originally from Hancock County.

Excitedly, I returned to the Anderson Genealogical Library and immediately fast-forwarded the process by beginning the task of reviewing census records. With some help, I was able to locate my grandparents, Richard and Jessie Terrell, in the 1910 census. I was shocked! There it was as it had been all along. The information listed Richard and Jessie Terrell living in a house on Jackson Street in the Norfield Village, which was near a local saw mill in Lincoln County. Their children were listed as James, age 3, who was my father's brother, and, of course, Lee, age 1 1/2, who was my father. My grandfather's age was listed as 27, while his wife, Jessie, was listed as being 22 years of age.

By now I was thoroughly hooked. Perhaps I could find my great grandfather in the U.S. Census! Because of time restraints, several weeks passed before I could get back to the Anderson Genealogical Library, but eventually I returned. And this time I knew exactly where to start.

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Philip Terrell is originally from Bay St. Louis, and at present lives in Pass Christian with his family. Currently, Terrell is Superintendent of the Pass Christian Public School District and is active in various civic and community initiatives along the Coast. (This article will continue in the next issue)*

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## EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

*George T. Watson*

George, a prominent native of the Pass, graduated from Randolph High School in 1943, and was drafted for duty with the Marines during World War II. He then pursued his B.S. Degree graduating *Magna Cum Laude*. After teaching a few years he took leave to join the Douglas Aircraft Corporation in California where he also completed his Masters Degree at the University of California. Soon after his return, in 1961, he was appointed Principal at his Alma Mater, Randolph High, which is now the location of Pass Christian Middle School, and in 1972, he was appointed Assistant Superintendent for the Pass Christian School District.

Desiring further education, he took leave and received an advanced degree at the University of Miami where he was further recognized for his 4.0 grade-point average, and formally inducted into Epsilon Tau Lambda Scholastic Honorary Society.



George Watson, early began his participation as a community volunteer by championing many causes and by serving on many boards and commissions. In 1978, the Rotary Club presented him the "Outstanding Citizen of the Year" award.

George is well known throughout the state of Mississippi. In 1980, Governor William Winter appointed him to the State Board of Trustees for Institutions of Higher Learning filling an at-large position. The following year, Governor Winter made a talk at Pass High specifically announcing his sincere gratitude and friendship for George Watson.

Governor Ray Mabus appointed him Southern District Commissioner for the State's Public Service Commission. In the same year Alcorn State University presented him with its "Distinguished Achievement Award." In 1991, he was honored with the University of Mississippi's Annual Award of Distinction. In 1995, George was honored again by being named an Advisory Director to the Hancock Bank. Currently, he serves on the Harrison County Tourism Commission. He recently reflected, "I think Pass Christian, today, has finally reached where we were prior to Camille. Camille set us back so far. Needless to say, we have, a long, long way to go. However, there's an attitude of moving forward and there is a togetherness to go forward."

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## **PEGGY JOHNSON**

Peggy is usually known as the city's Code Enforcement Officer. She always maintains an industrious approach to life with a passion for accomplishment. During her highschool sophomore year she applied to CETA for summer youth employment. Little did she realize that she would be picking up trash from the streets and washing school buses, but she did it with uncompromising zeal. Upon graduating from Pass High in 1975, she went on to graduate from Jackson State University majoring in Urban Studies and Community Development.

Her first position with the City was in 1985 when she accepted the Community Services Director position. In other capacities she worked in the Utilities Department, the Harbor Department, and the Tax office.

Never shirking a duty, Peggy now serves in many roles; some of which are: License and Permit Supervisor, Deputy Court Clerk, Historic Preservation Officer, Zoning Enforcement Officer, Secretary to the Planning Commission, Secretary to the Zoning Board, and minutes clerk for the Harbor Commission. She realizes that the City is in budget restrictions and has allowed herself to wear these many hats.

Peggy's untiring efforts to serve the Community, its Boards, its Commissions, its citizens, has not blemished her performance in required tasks. In September of 1994, the members of the Rotary Club recognized her devotion by awarding Ms. Johnson a plaque by acknowledging her as "Employee of the Year". With added commitments, she also energetically serves as Recording Secretary on the Tricentennial Committee.

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## **Valerie Isabelle**

Val has served as Administrative Assistant through two mayors. Bay St. Louis is her birthplace and attended St. Rose DeLima and graduated from Bay High. She was the 1998 recipient for the Rotary's "Outstanding Employee Award."

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## **Regina Dailey**

Experience and years in municipal employ proved a position promotion for former insurance underwriter, Regina Dailey, who with six years as a city hall clerk has been elevated to office manager for Pass Christian Utilities.

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## **Cynthia Anderson**

As Library Clerk at the Public Library, Cynthia is always available to help with a smile and a kind word. In her free time she is a school programs volunteer at St. Stanislaus and Pass Christian schools.

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## **Otis Gates, Sr.**

Otis retired from the Army after 20 years and then went on to become a registered nurse and supervisor of respiratory therapy at the Biloxi Veterans Affairs Medical Center for 18 years. Keeping very active, he serves on the Board of Directors of the Gulf Coast Community Action Agency, Treasurer of Grand Knights of Peter Claver Council #26, and a member of the city Planning and Zoning commission. If that's not enough, he dutifully fills a part-time driver position for Coastal Family Health unit. As Parish Council President for Mother of Mercy Catholic Church, Otis Gates, Sr., this month, received an Apostolic Blessing and Citation for his outstanding spiritual and community services, which was presented in open Mass by Josephite priest of Mother of Mercy, Reverend Bartholomew S. Endslow, S.S.J., Pastor.



## Louis Raymond Perkins

Dr. Perkins, a graduate from Randolph High School in Pass Christian, enlisted with the Navy in June 1942. Following the war, he received his B.S. Degree in 1949 and his Masters Degree in 1957, followed by his doctorate.

During his early years in the Pass, he was one of the organizers of the *Knights of Zeus*, which conducted Mardi Gras Balls and Parades in downtown Pass Christian during 1939 and 1940, and he organized a Civil Defense Unit for which he received a Mayoral Commendation from former Mayor W.G. Simpson.

As a world traveler and Educator, Perkins was a College professor at the University of the District of Columbia and now teaches part-time at the National Institute of Health, Bethesda, Maryland.

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## Horace Labat - The Businessman

Horace, owner of *Labat's Bar-B-Q Grill*, located on Davis Avenue north of the tracks, has renovated many Pass Christian beachfront homes. He also helped build quite a few of them. He has commented that, "These old houses have been through a lot of storms . . . the wood framing is what makes them stand up. Old houses will stand a long time more if they are handled right."

Pass Christian homeowners call him a "real craftsman." He was the rare wood worker who could build an 1890s style porch from scratch and make the neighbors think it has always been there.

His approach to restoration work wasn't for the timid. It is said that Labat would not pre-price projects, nor would he be told exactly what to do. "If a man can't meet the price, then corners get cut. I don't cut corners," he used to say.

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## Lucien Piernas

Lucien is part of the lineage of early coastal Negro settlers, which includes the Piernases from Bay St. Louis, the "Pass" Morgan family, and he is also related to the well known Marshall Dedeaux.

Lucien did not make significant economic gains in his lifetime, however, he is now retired and lives in a modest home. Not having opportunity for early education, his first job at 15 years, was at a Scenic Drive boarding house where he was paid \$5 a month and 3 meals a day while working everyday from 7am to 9pm. At age 16, he started as a janitor and worked up to Floor Manager at the *Community*

*Cash Store* owned by Owen P. Farrell.

At age 27, he was hired as a waiter at the Merchant Marine Academy at Henderson Point, then, a military base, which gave him the opportunity to go to New York for one year to wait tables in the officers dining hall. Never having journeyed from the Pass and just married, he took the opportunity as a honeymoon adventure. The Merchant Marines left the "Pass", so at 32 years he was back at Farrell's again.

He later became a bartender for the PCI Golf Club from 1960 to 1976, and then the Pass Christian Yacht Club, where he remained from 1976 to 1990. Lucien claims about 300 living relatives in the "Pass" area. As a retired citizen in a retirement community, Lucien is quick to state that after working all his life, social security isn't what he thought it would be.

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## Afro-American Club

The birth of the Afro-American Club in Pass Christian High School in 1970 proved valuable to school relations of that era. After the second full year of club activities, Ralph Salvant, president of Pass High Club, summed up the benefits, "It gives them a feeling of belonging and provides an opportunity for self-expression. For instance," he continued, "when a student may want to sing, dance or just rap a little, someone is there to listen. This gives a feeling of importance to the black student in a predominantly white school."

Alexander Dedeaux, club vice president, stated, "Black students feel more a part of the school because of the club . . . (by showing) fellow blacks the right way to settle disputes (and) getting problems off their chests".

In 1972, the club had 146 members which constituted a bi-racial mix.

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## Around the Community

*(A partial listing of local contributors)*

### Educators

**Teachers:** Chantel Babs, Elvina Barnes, Mary Bowser, Phyllis Watson Barnes, David Dedeaux, Marilyn Dedeaux, Otis Gates, Jr., Gwendolyn Lawyer, Doyle Moffett, Lawarnda Singleton, Hall Walker, Lawrence Webb, Winston Ausmer, Theodora Breaux, Verna Hall Walker, Louis Hall, Ella Hall, Phyllis Watson Bourn, Lynn Twyner, Maude Rucker, Margie Foxworth, Lawrence Webb, Eddie Antoine, Jr.,



**Retired Teachers:** Dorothy Antoine, Mattie Bradley, Michael Bowser, Prentiss Ginn, Jessie Hawthorne, Betty Moffett, Alva Singleton, Huey Singleton, Adrian Swanier, Corrine Swanier, George Watson, Rev. Tose Williams, Victoria Webb.

**Deceased:** Alberta Butler, Gladys Bowser, Betty Ginn, Sadie Williams, J.J. Cotten, Delphine Murray Scott, Eugenia Murray Saucier, Armenta Hall, Simuel Hall, Phoebe Payne, Olivia Brown.

Former School Board members, Eddie Antoine, Bidwell Barnes, Col. Lawrence Roberts.

**Superintendent of Schools:** Dr. Philip Terrell

**Other Educators:** Dr. Louis Perkins, Dr. Evelyn Webb, Laura Cappie, Dorothy Salvant, Mary Conway.

## Professional Contributors

Dr. Theodore Atkinson, M.D., Dr. Elise Donaville, M.D., Dr. Greg Antoine, M.D., Dr. Roslynn Webb, M.D., Dr. Maceo Dennis, M.D., Dr. J.O. Tate, D.D.S.,

**Attorneys:** Theodore J. Lawyer, Warren Conway, Kevin Antoine, and Judge Wayne Salvant.

## Political Leaders

Michael Antoine, Alderman, Ward 3

Theodore J. Lawyer, former Mayor

Lionel Landry, former Alderman

William Welch, former Alderman

## Contributors from the Arts

**Musicians:** Alfraizer Acker, Mary Bowser, Gene Bradley, John Handy, Joseph Jackson, "Jug" Jackson, Eddie Joe Lyons, Don "Cadillac" Henry, and the Watson Brothers Band, Edward, Henry, Harry and Charles. **Artist,** Joseph Pearson and **T.V. Personality,** Robin Roberts.

## Community/Service/Civic Contributors

Eddie P. Antoine, Myrtle Ashley, Sammie Barnes, Jeronio Brown, Idella Barnes, Laura Cappie, Marie Donaville, Yvonne Fields, Olivia Hunter, Steve Hunter, Mrs. Govan, Vernelia McCathen, Veronica McKay, Athalia Piernas, Henry Piernas, Sr., Wallace Rials, Lucimarian Roberts, Eugenia Saucier, Anna Mae Swanier, and former Assistant Police Chief, Anthony Johnson.

## Landmarks

**James "Smokey" Welch**, former Public Service Department head is namesake for the Smokey Welch Annex on Second Street.

**Ricky Levy**, former Public Service employee, namesake for the West Marina Harbor Park.

**Handy Street** was formerly Third Street and was renamed for John Handy, internationally renown musician.

**Asmard Street** crossing from Henderson Avenue may have been named for Charles Asmard., or perhaps the Widow Asmar.

## Religious Leaders

Rev. Brown, Goodwill Baptist Church

Rev. Bobby Dailey, Pastor

Rev. Barney Govan, Pastor

Rev. O.D. Gilmer, St. Paul United Methodist Church

Rev. Harry Scott, Goodwill Baptist Church

Rev. Harry C. Tartt, Goodwill Baptist Church

Rev. Harry Toussaint, Pastor Goodwill Baptist Church

Rev. Rose Williams, Mt. Zion Methodist Church, DeLisle

Rev. William Young, Pastor First Baptist Church

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## An African Prayer

Utuombee sasa

Na tunapokufa

*Pray for us now,  
and when we die!*

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## WE CARE!

The We Care Committee, headed by Otis Gates, is 11-member strong in their capacity and all heart in their community performances to raise money for those in need. They usually gather at Labat's on Davis Avenue and put on fish fries and barbecues to raise funds for a charitable cause.

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## Editorial Department

Dan Ellis - 452-3138

Dayton Robinson - 452-4543

POB 354, Pass Christian, MS 39571

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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

*Pass Christian Tricentennial Banquet  
Tuesday, March 30, 1999 - 6:00 P.M.*

*Pass Christian Yacht Club - \$20*

*Speaker:*

*Hon. William F. Winter*

*Former Mississippi Governor and Historian*

*Sponsored by:*

The Pass Christian Historical Society

The Rotary Club of Pass Christian

The Pass Christian Area Chamber of Commerce

The Pass Christian Area Tricentennial Committee

For Info: John Lutenbacher 452-9296

## **St. Paddys Day Parade Wearin' o' the Green**

Sunday, March 14, 1999 - 1:00 p.m.

Scenic Drive -- Fleitas to Miramar

**Grand Marshall - "Chipper" McDermott**

**Colleen - Rachel Layne McDonald**

For Info, Call: Dan Ellis - 452-3138

or, Chipper McDermott - 452-2952

## **Billy's Quirky Korner**

*Billy Bourdin reports that no one was interested enough to call him about a former name for Pass Christian Harbor. It was known as Adam's Harbor. Next Question: Name any of the three Pass Christian boys who graduated from U.S. Military Academy - West Point. Hint: This was reported in June 1938. Billy can be reached at 452-2661.*

## **Friends of the Library**

Meets every Friday at 10:00 a.m. at the Library. Newcomers and former members are most welcome to join in local information updates and **FUNRAISIN' FUNDRAISIN'** for the Library.

## Farewell -- Paul Bode

He was a Christian Soldier and Gentleman all of his life. Paul will be sadly missed for his many contributions to the Gulf Coast and to the Pass Christian community as well as the many clubs and organizations he blessed.

## **HAND AND GLOVE**

They didn't wait to see if Public Works was going to do the job. After several complaints, Aldermen Margaret Jean Kalif and "Chipper" McDermott personally attacked the problem on a Saturday morning by cutting back the *Pyracantha* which presented a thorny situation.

## **New Paid Members through January 31**

### Individuals & Families

Billy Bourdin

Helen Davis

Dennis Garland

Margaret Gambrell

Mrs. James Jacobs

Homer & Connie Jenkins

Margaret Jean Kalif

Marguerite Kalif

Ralph H. Ladner

Roland & Frances Martin

Billy & Elaine McDonald

Tommy Munro

Lynn M. Steube

James & Hilda Williams

### Merchants & Businesses

Fillette, Green Shipping

Olde Community Shops

### Clubs & Organizations

Pass Christian Art Asso.

Enclosed is \$15 or more for  
Tricentennial Membership

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_



PASS CHRISTIAN, MS

The  
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# Asmard Claim

